CONTOUR FARMING INCREASES INCOME, REDUCES EROSION IN BANGLADESH

WASHINGTON AUGUST 2 -- Masud Ahmed is the self-proclaimed "pineapple pioneer" of the Hail Haor wetlands region of northeast Bangladesh. In 2002, Ahmed started working with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to improve his pineapple production by adopting a planting technique known as contour planting.

USAID introduced horizontal contour planting in the region to combat soil erosion. The technique, at first, was unpopular. "The other farmers called me crazy" for adopting it, Ahmed recalls.

For 20 years, deforestation and poor land use had increased the rate of soil erosion in the wetlands. The traditional practice of planting pineapples in vertical rows on hill slopes had been particularly damaging. During monsoon season, soil exposed to a large amount of rainfall was swept away to lower-lying wetlands, rapidly accumulating as silt and contributing to a loss of wetland habitats that support diverse animal and plant species.

Ahmed’s yield nearly doubled after he adopted the contour method. He has contoured five hectares of the 10 hectares he cultivates, with plans eventually to contour all his land. Seeing Ahmed's results, an additional 20 farmers, including those who had called contouring a crazy idea, now are applying the same technique to their own fields and are able to earn up to 50 percent more utilizing the same amount of land.

"By following the contouring method, I could reduce erosion and improve my output of pineapples," Ahmed said.

"We had never seen fields like this before."

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(Distributed by the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: http://usinfo.state.gov)

GR/ 2006

Note: *A Bangla translation of this article is also available from the American Center. If you are interested in the translation, please call the American Center Press Section (Tel: 8837150-4, Fax: 9885688; e-mail:* DhakaPA@state.gov; *Website: dhaka.usembassy.gov*